



DEVELOPING AND MANAGING TALENT IN THE SEA

The Need

State education agencies (SEAs) are reframing their work to be more coordinated and strategic but talent in most SEAs continues to be in large part defined by federal programs and oriented toward the routines of compliance. SEAs hoping to complete the pivot from a compliance focus and implement new strategic initiatives are going beyond their existing organizational charts to seek individuals with strong management, entrepreneurship, and strategic visioning skills.

The Context

Existing talent pipelines in SEAs are rooted in the historic functions of administering federal programs and doing little more. But, in an era of education reform, tight state budgets, and increasing public expectations, SEAs face new demands to:

- More efficiently manage SEA initiatives and assess progress toward goals;
- Improve data systems to more precisely track performance of students in local education agencies (LEAs) and schools;
- Intensify and diversify efforts to support the improvement of LEAs and schools; and
- Encourage and evaluate innovative models of teaching, learning, and school design.

State superintendents addressing these new demands often find that existing staff rarely have the skills or dispositions to serve in the new roles required for successfully meeting the needs. For the first time in many years, the SEA needs a talent strategy.

An ideal *talent pipeline* is a database or pool of qualified, relevant candidates that is maintained for future hiring needs and includes a plan for developing and acquiring the talent to fill staffing gaps. The plan includes an assessment of critical roles and existing employees with the right competencies, as well as external candidates; sources for candidates; definition of development programs (education and training opportunities) to prepare employees to move into critical roles (AICPA, 2012; Mefford, Corrado, & Bluementhal, 2012; Oracle, 2012; Smith, 2010).



The Opportunity

SEAs at the leading edge in developing talent strategies draw upon a variety of approaches. In doing so, they:

- Re-draw their organizational charts with functions around SEA goals instead of funding streams;
- Seek individuals with the skills necessary for management and strategic decision making;
- Draw from the private sector or new education pipelines (e.g., Teach for America, Gates Data Fellows or Broad Residents) to recruit talent;
- Use budget cuts to eliminate poorly utilized positions; and
- Find new ways to mobilize external organizations to support the SEA's work.

Lessons from these leaders, as well as the talent strategies used by fast-paced innovative private sector firms can inform SEAs across the country as they examine their changing talent needs and how to meet them.

The Work

The Collaborative Benchmarking process is described in the attached paper, *Discovering and Implementing Best Practices to Strengthen SEAs: Collaborative Benchmarking*. The study will be led by the Building State Capacity and Productivity Center (BSCP Center), meaning that we will provide the facilitation leader, provide or acquire the subject matter expert (SME), and provide the staff support to conduct the work. We will recruit interested Regional Comprehensive Center (RCC) and SEA teams to obtain guidance on which specific aspects of talent development they wish to learn about. The ideal SEA team will be comprised of individuals who have a high level of authority in the SEA in order to affect change, who know and lead the accomplishment of SEA goals, who collectively have knowledge of existing talent pipelines and needs, and who are motivated to make improvements to talent management. Ideally too, RCCs will participate with their SEAs throughout the process giving them support, providing travel funding, and helping plan implementation of the process changes. Our goal is that the RCCs will continue to support the SEAs in the implementation of the process improvement activities.

References

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The Building State Capacity and Productivity Center (BSCP Center) focuses on helping state education agencies (SEAs) throughout the country, as they adapt to reduced fiscal resources and increased demands for greater productivity. As State Departments of Education are facing a daunting challenge of improving student performance with diminishing financial resources, the BSCP Center provides technical assistance to SEAs that builds their capacity to support local educational agencies (LEAs or districts) and schools, and to the other 21 regional and content comprehensive centers that serve them, by providing high quality information, tools, and implementation support. The partners in the BSCP Center are Edvance Research, Inc., the Academic Development Institute, the Center on Reinventing Public Education (University of Washington), and the Fiscal Analytics Unit (Georgetown University).

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